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SUBJECT: UN SPECIAL ENVOY MORRIS IN THE ZIMBABWEAN PRESS

11. Zimbabwe's government-owned "Herald" newspaper attempted to twist comments made by UN Special Envoy for Humanitarian Needs in Southern Africa James Morris after his January 24 meeting with President Mugabe in Harare. The front page of the January 25 "Herald" informed readers that Morris "accepted the irreversibility of Zimbabwe's land reform program." Because the independent press are excluded from State House where Morris spoke to media after his meeting with Mugabe, that gross distortion might have stood, but Morris used his January 25 pre-departure press conference to set the record straight. His frank criticism of the "Herald's" politically motivated distortion provided a choice lead in the January 27 "Standard," a privately owned weekly. Excerpts follow:

12. Under headline "Help new farmers: U.N. special envoy" the "Herald" (01/25) carried the following lead story:

"Humanitarian agencies working in Zimbabwe should help provide farmers with water and inputs, visiting U.N. special envoy Mr. Tim (sic) Morris said yesterday, accepting the irreversibility of land reform in essence. This help to farmers was necessary, in addition to providing immediate food aid to those in need of assistance. 'We need to work very hard to provide people with water, fertilizers and inputs. . .,' he told journalists soon after meeting President Mugabe at State House. 'Food is only a piece of it. In a drought, the provision of water is very important.' Mr. Morris said the provision of water, fertilizers and other agricultural inputs would enhance the capacity of the famine stricken families to feed themselves. The U.N. official expressed optimism and satisfaction with food distribution mechanisms and the efforts being undertaken by the government to deal with the HIV/AIDs scourge. . . ."

13. Under headline "Herald lied 100 (percent), says U.N. envoy" the independent weekly "The Standard" (01/26) carried the following article by Henry Makiwa:

"James Morris, the U.N. special envoy for Humanitarian Needs in Southern Africa, yesterday dressed down the state-controlled daily, The Herald, saying it had peddled '100 (percent) lies,' in yesterday's front-page lead story. Morris who says his deep-seated concern for the humanitarian crisis in Zimbabwe should be accurately reflected, told journalists, diplomats and government officials at a press conference, that he was shocked to see 'The Herald' publish a story purporting that he had accepted the irreversibility of the land reform exercise. . . Morris said The Herald's lead story. . . constituted a gross misrepresentation of what he had said when addressing journalists on Friday afternoon. . . Said Morris yesterday: 'The comments in 'The Herald' were 100 (percent) lies. I did not comment as 'The Herald' purportedly reports in its front-page story today. . . I did not accept that the land reform process was irreversible as they quote me as saying. It was gross misrepresentation of the worst form. 'What I did say was that the future of Zimbabwe depended on the success of a robust agro-based economy. It was also embarrassing that 'The Herald' repeatedly quoted me as 'Tim Morris' when my real name is James Morris. Ironically, I have a 36-year-old son called Tim who will probably be attributed to The Herald's utterances, not myself!' Morris said. . . ."

SULLIVAN